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General Assembly
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Official Records

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Wednesday, 25 November 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 32

Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/488 and Corr.1)

Draft resolution (A/53/L.41)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.41 and Corr.1.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation is extremely pleased to introduce, on behalf of the members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, the draft resolution contained in document A/53/L.41 and Corr.1.

Since its creation in 1985, the zone, which is composed of three Latin America countries and 21 African countries — all of them bordering on the South Atlantic — has shown itself to be flexible enough to adapt to the changes that have occurred in the world since the end of the cold war. Argentina is pleased to see that we have made steady progress towards the objectives set when the zone was established more than 10 years ago. Five high-level meetings have already been held, the most recent in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 21 and 22 October 1998. A Final Declaration was adopted at that meeting, as was, for the first time, a Plan of Action with specific mechanisms aimed at gradually achieving the objectives of the zone.

We have clear goals in basic areas such as the strengthening of peace and security, the peaceful and negotiated settlement of all disputes pending in the region, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance, promotion of trade and investment among the Latin American and African members of the zone, protection of the environment and the living resources of the sea, cooperation in combating drug trafficking, and the development of the concept of solidarity among members of the zone in the event of emergency humanitarian situations.

With respect to the first of those objectives, Argentina believes that the nuclear-weapon-free zones contribute significantly to international peace and security by progressively shrinking the area available for the use or threat of use of such weapons. Illicit arms trafficking and the proliferation of small arms also deserve close attention, and for that reason, Argentina welcomes the recent entry into force within our continent of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials.

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With respect to the question of peace and security, I wish to reiterate that the Argentine Republic is in full agreement with the appeal made year after year by members of the zone urging all States to refrain from any action incompatible with the objectives of the zone, in particular all acts that may create or aggravate situations of tension and potential conflict in the region. The Argentine Republic therefore urges all States, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Organization, to seek a peaceful, just and definitive solution to all the disputes still pending in our region.

The objectives of peace and cooperation in the zone can be attained only through the smooth functioning of democratic institutions, respect for human rights and good governance. All members of our zone share these values, which have become increasingly entrenched on both Atlantic coasts since the zone's establishment in 1985. We sincerely believe that the zone has provided a setting that is conducive to these positive developments.

Argentina also considers that matters relating to peace and development are interrelated and inseparable, and therefore believes in the importance of promoting technical and economic cooperation, trade and investment among zone members. We are pleased at the progress achieved by other member States in the areas of economic stability, State modernization, the opening up of markets and the privatization of public enterprises.

The fact that the majority of zone members have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea certainly is grounds for satisfaction, for it shows our commitment to preserving marine species. However, while the Convention establishes an adequate regulatory framework for protecting living marine resources, in some areas its provisions must be complemented. Hence Argentina attaches great importance to the imminent entry into force of the Fish Stocks Agreement, adopted in New York in 1995.

Another matter to which Argentina would draw the Assembly's attention relates to the carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high-level radioactive waste. In this connection I would express Argentina's concern, which is fully shared by other countries of the zone, at the danger posed by the transport through the South Atlantic of vessels carrying radioactive waste. For that reason, without prejudice to the timely establishment of an appropriate legal regime, the interests of the coastal States must be taken into account.

Turning to the struggle against drug trafficking and related crimes, Argentina reiterates its readiness to cooperate to attain the objectives of our zone in accordance with the declaration adopted at Somerset West, South Africa, in 1996 and the Buenos Aires Plan of Action of October 1998.

Nor can I fail to mention the question of humanitarian assistance and the positive impact of the White Helmets initiative within our zone, which is an expression of solidarity among our members. Through the White Helmets, assistance has been provided to communities in areas as varied as Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

I should like to thank the Republic of Benin for the generous offer to host the sixth high-level meeting of the States members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Lastly, I urge all representatives present here today, bearing in mind the noble objectives of our zone, to lend their support to draft resolution A/53/L.41 so that it can be adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Pérez-Otermin (Uruguay): The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic provides United Nations work to promote cooperation among Member States a means of supporting basic coordination among African and Latin American countries.

Uruguay accords this interregional cooperation the highest priority. In recent years the strengthening of ties between our country and African countries has accelerated. Today we are proud to be hosting in Montevideo the Afro-Latin American Institute, which can become a factor for dynamic cooperation among the parties. The late Vice-President of Uruguay, Mr. Hugo Batalla, attached great importance to our becoming closer to Africa, and last year he made a trip in order to speak directly with the leaders of the countries of the region so as to demonstrate the desire of the Uruguayan authorities to participate actively in common projects. We have also been involved in various United Nations peacekeeping operations, including Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Western Sahara. In addition, we have provided assistance for the removal of anti-personnel landmines.

Last 21 and 22 October, at the fifth meeting of States members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, which was held in Buenos Aires,

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Argentina, a Final Declaration and Plan of Action was adopted. These documents established the direction to be followed after the decisions taken at Somerset West, South Africa. The meeting also provided an opportunity to make an assessment of and to pursue our objective of bringing Africa and Latin America closer together.

In Buenos Aires, Uruguay proposed establishing mechanisms for cooperation among the countries of the zone in order to manage our water resources efficiently and responsibly, since future water shortages would cause serious economic, social and political problems.

We have also made significant progress in cooperating in the fight against drug-trafficking. In this area we remain concerned by the low level of support the United Nations International Drug Control Programme has received in accordance with the conclusions of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to the fight against narcotics, which took place from 8 to 10 June of this year in New York.

The expansion of our agenda leads me to think that the sixth meeting of ministers of the zone, to be held in Benin, will generate new proposals that will consolidate the excellent results achieved in Buenos Aires.

If we add to this promising panorama the declaration of Ushuaia by which the Presidents of the Southern Cone Common Market countries reaffirmed that our countries were a part of the zone of peace, we find we are engaged in an unprecedented undertaking for building new modalities for cooperation, a cooperation that has taken on a very special and promising importance for our relations, which are already exemplary.

We have a clear mandate, and we believe in the mutual benefit that we can derive from this process of improving the well-being of our peoples in an ocean that we share and that unites us.

Mr. Vermeulen (South Africa): South Africa is honoured to speak in support of draft resolution A/53/L.41, entitled "Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic", introduced by Argentina in its capacity as Chairman of the zone. Good progress is being made between the member nations of the zone in promoting regional cooperation based on common ideals of peace, security and development.

South Africa wishes to congratulate Argentina for hosting a successful fifth meeting of States members in Buenos Aires in October this year. The Final Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that meeting set the objectives and guidelines for further enhancing and accelerating cooperation in political, economic, scientific, cultural and other spheres among zone members.

South Africa is satisfied with the recent results achieved through cooperation between zone members, of which the most noteworthy is the resolution on cooperation in drug control adopted at the fortieth session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. This resolution was initiated by members of the zone, in consultation with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. In order to take account of the complexities of this problem, the countering of illicit drug trafficking must be addressed from a regional and global perspective. Zone member countries recognize that they have a special obligation in this regard and are seeking ways to improve cooperation in order to effectively combat this scourge.

The South Atlantic Ocean is the determining physical common denominator among member countries of the zone. It is a medium of transport, a source of food and a common boundary for zone members. The protection of this fragile environment should be the concern not only of the members of the zone, but of everyone who utilizes its resources.

Issues of peace and security also remain a priority for zone members, especially demilitarization and disarmament. Members continue to promote non-proliferation and disarmament, particularly in the field of nuclear weapons and conventional arms. For this reason, the fifth meeting of zone members reiterated the need for greater cooperation towards making the southern hemisphere free of nuclear weapons and the need to address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which presents a threat to peace and security in the South Atlantic. The meeting also called for greater cooperation in support of international demining efforts.

The zone furthermore strives to promote economic regeneration in order to eradicate poverty and to attain sustainable rates of growth and economic development. This will improve the quality of life of millions of the zone's people and help close the gap between the rich and the poor. Other objectives include the promoting of people-to-people contact through tourism and cultural and sporting relations.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has laid a firm foundation for bridging the South Atlantic and finding ways to meet both old and new challenges so as to make a real difference in the lives of ordinary people. As a sponsor of the draft resolution before us, South Africa urges all Member States to support this draft resolution so that it may be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Valle (Brazil): My delegation extends its support to draft resolution A/53/L.41, on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, which is sponsored by all 24 members of the zone, from Africa and South America.

As mentioned, the countries of the zone held their fifth ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 21 and 22 October 1998. In addition to the traditional Final Declaration, the ministerial meeting adopted for the first time a Plan of Action which sets targets to be reached in the near future. Both texts were circulated as an annex to document A/53/650.

The Buenos Aires meeting further consolidates the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic as a framework involving countries from the two shores of the South Atlantic. The zone provides a tool, supplementary to existing international organizations and arrangements, that we hope will allow its members better coordination in facing common problems.

As set forth in our reply to the Secretary-General's request for views on the implementation of the declaration of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, Brazil considers that there are three priority areas to be further developed within the context of the zone: complete denuclearization of the region, protection of the marine environment and cooperation in the fight against illegal drug trafficking.

In the field of denuclearization, the area of application of the Treaty of Tlatelolco encompasses the whole South American landmass, as well as a large part of the western South Atlantic Ocean. The Treaty of Pelindaba is also of great importance to the status of the zone, and since last September all zone members are now parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with the accession by Brazil to the Treaty. From our perspective, the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, together with the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Rarotonga and Bangkok and the Antarctic Treaty, contributes to a southern hemisphere free of nuclear weapons.

Another area of great importance is cooperation in the protection of the marine environment and the conservation of the sea's living resources. Bilaterally and multilaterally, Brazil is working with its neighbours to finalize the delimitation of the continental shelf under their jurisdiction. Brazil favours the adoption of new mechanisms on this issue, within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, that would help to prevent environmental accidents and promote the exchange of information and concerted actions in these areas.

From the Brazilian perspective, the fight against the scourge of drug trafficking is an objective that should be actively pursued in the zone. This perception was recognized at the twentieth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, held last June. The countries of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic formally launched an anti-drug initiative in their fourth ministerial meeting, held at Somerset West, South Africa, in April 1996. They subsequently took their case to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which adopted a resolution on that matter. The countries of the area are also pursuing bilateral agreements among themselves, cooperating to increase the efficacy of their efforts against this form of organized crime.

It is essential that the international community, the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the international financial institutions, continue to assist the zone in proceeding towards its objectives. Brazil, which has been closely associated with the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic since its inception, accords outstanding importance to the zone as a forum capable of furthering the dialogue among the countries of western Africa and eastern South America. Both sides of the Atlantic can benefit from each other's experience in the promotion of democratic values, the expansion of trade and investment, air and sea links and the intensification of South-South cooperation.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has gone through moments of lull. Notwithstanding, it has gained a new momentum, as shown by the meetings of Brasilia in 1994, Somerset West in 1996 and Buenos Aires last October. It is a process that will be consolidated in the sixth meeting, to be held in Benin — a most welcome offer.

The adoption by the General Assembly of draft resolution A/53/L.41, which was introduced by the

Ambassador of Argentina, will represent an endorsement by the international community of a joint effort that aims to create building blocks of cooperation, peace and security. The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic can be a forum where organizations like the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) and the Community of Central African States can add their specific strengths to further the common ideals of peace and development.

Mr. Akunwafor (Nigeria): The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has continued to represent a valuable framework for the promotion and protection of the interests and aspirations of the coastal countries of Africa and Latin America on both sides of the Atlantic. In this regard, the adoption of resolution 41/11 of 27 October 1986 by this Assembly at its forty-first session constituted a historic landmark in multilateral initiatives to promote regional peace and international security. These objectives have progressively energized the efforts of the zone towards complete denuclearization of the region, protection of the marine environment and promotion of economic cooperation, trade and investment, as well as the fight against drug trafficking. Nigeria has contributed tremendously to the joint efforts to maximize these opportunities and cooperation, as well as the enormous potential in material resources in the zone.

My delegation is pleased with the progress of the zone in fostering regional peace and cooperation through enhanced understanding and political and socio-economic contacts. We take great satisfaction in the progress made in the past year in the resolution of some conflict situations in the region which would have posed severe threats to regional peace and stability. Of particular interest is the restoration of peace and democracy in Sierra Leone and Liberia by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-regional Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

The developments in Guinea-Bissau have also been encouraging, giving hope that the joint mediation initiatives of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) and ECOWAS will lead to the restoration of peace in that country and security to the subregion.

My delegation views with concern the present conflict situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and urges the parties to that conflict and the States that have offered their good offices to spare no efforts in restoring peace to that country. The positive response by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in the negotiations would ensure that the parties to the conflict would honour the agreement to facilitate the resolution of the conflict.

We also note the positive steps taken by the Government of Angola in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol. There is little doubt that the current impasse in the peace process in that country is a result of the failure of the leadership of UNITA to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions in that respect. Nigeria fully endorses the Final Communiqué of the Summit of the Heads of State and Government or the Southern African Development Community, which was adopted at Port Louis, Mauritius, on 14 September 1998, calling on UNITA to submit unreservedly to the processes of the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

Apart from the resolution of conflicts, the protection of the environment has also remained a dominant factor in the agenda of the region. The determined efforts of the member States of the region crystallized in the establishment of a dump-watch mechanism in 1988 for the prevention of the dumping of radioactive and hazardous wastes in the region, especially in the West African subregion. It would be recalled that the support of the zone for Nigeria was crucial in getting the issue of the dumping of nuclear and industrial wastes in Africa included in the agenda of the forty-third session of this Assembly.

Equally significant is the recognition by member States of the zone for early entry into force of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, adopted in New York in 1995. This would not only protect marine life and other sea resources, but would also safeguard the interests of developing countries which lack the capacity to protect their marine resources against illicit fishing activities by commercial fishing vessels.

There is, however, the need for better coordination and exchange of information in monitoring and identifying vessels involved in illegal fishing, as well as in establishing the mechanism to combat the menace. The mechanism must extend well beyond the zone, in collaboration with other regions, to control the movement

of long-distance fishing fleets that invade the Atlantic frequently.

Nigeria remains concerned, along with other members of the zone, over the increase in drug trafficking and money laundering by criminal organizations and individuals. These groups, having penetrated and corrupted legitimate financial activities, as well as administrative structures of Governments, have succeeded in distorting national fiscal policies. This is why the special session of the General Assembly on drug control, held in June this year, expressed serious concern over the illicit traffic in drugs.

It is equally pertinent to note that significant transformations have taken place at the international and zonal levels since the inception of the zone, starting with the end of the cold war and the increasing globalization of the world economy. The changes in the world economy have created tremendous opportunities as well as risks for the economies in the zone. Thus, while we recognize that liberalization and globalization hold great promises of prosperity for developing countries, their impact so far has been very severe. They have brought with them the marginalization and exclusion of a large number of developing countries from the globalization process. The Asian financial crisis, spreading from region to region, has further complicated the economic problems of the developing countries by worsening their trade deficits, as a result of the steep reduction of the importation of commodities from Africa by the Asian and other developed countries affected directly by the crisis.

This situation has shown conclusively the dire need to integrate South-South socio-economic institutions as a way of pooling their resources to cushion the effects of such financial crisis. Integration will also give the developing countries negotiating leverage within the multilateral forums, especially the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The integration of the economies of the developing countries into the world economy must be balanced by their being given full trading opportunities, such as market access for their products, the elimination of trade-distorting policies and non-tariff barriers, as well as technical assistance to strengthen their supply capacity. The fostering of fair trade and market access with economic integration, in tandem with closer South-South cooperation, will provide the enabling environment for the sustained economic growth and sustainable development of the developing countries.

Member States of the zone are conscious of the dangers posed by the proliferation of small arms to the peace and security of the region. This phenomenon remains the source of arms for rebel groups in civil wars and bandits engaged in criminal activities. Nigeria welcomes the adoption of the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials of November 1997, as well as the decision taken at the thirty-fourth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity of June 1998 to ban the smuggling of firearms.

The international community has continued to give moral and material support towards the realization of the purposes and objectives of the zone. Member States, on their part, have continued to advance their cause at various meetings, the most recent of which took place last month in Buenos Aires. The draft resolution on this item has tried to include all that is relevant to the continued pursuit of the purposes and objectives of the zone. We took into particular consideration the various sensitivities and perspectives which led us to believe that the resulting formulation will enjoy global consensus. We are therefore delighted to commend it to the General Assembly for adoption without a vote.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): My delegation is once again pleased to be able to participate in the debate on this item. Namibia strongly believes that the zone is an indispensable instrument for cooperation among South Atlantic countries and has actively participated in its work.

The importance of the objectives in the creation of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic are today more evident than ever before. The multifaceted challenges that are facing our regions can be addressed effectively only if we join hands in regional set-ups, such as the zone, and tackle peace and security concerns, threats to the environment, the protection of marine resources and others, such as drug trafficking, jointly through the exchange of information, technical cooperation and other methods.

In this regard, we, as members of the zone, have accepted peace and security as among our principal objectives. We have thus been involved, in both the bilateral and multilateral contexts, in achieving that goal. The issue of peace and security cannot be linked only to military and political aspects, but it is also associated with economic, humanitarian and environmental matters.

We have resolved to apply the same commitment towards solving these issues.

Nuclear proliferation is one of the security issues of our age that we will face in the next millennium. The full implementation of the objectives of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the Antarctic Treaty and the Treaty of Rarotonga, together with the Pelindaba Treaty, can contribute to making a large area of our world free of nuclear weapons. We therefore repeat our call on others to join and respect similar initiatives in order to achieve a nuclear-free world.

I would also like to use this opportunity to express the appreciation of my delegation to the Secretary-General for his report on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, contained in document A/53/488. We further wish to commend the Governments and organizations for their replies to the Secretary-General's note verbale of 26 May 1998 in conveying their views on the activities of the zone. Such active participation will guarantee success in achieving our aims and objectives.

Namibia wholly subscribes to the conclusions contained in the Final Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the fifth ministerial meeting of the States members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, held in Buenos Aires on 21 and 22 October 1998. The meeting adopted, for the first time, a Plan of Action which is aimed at implementing the measures agreed upon. It also serves as evidence of the seriousness with which the members view the progress in the implementation of their proposals. In this regard, my delegation wishes to express its thanks to States Members of the United Nations and the international community for their continued support for the zone. For us, it means recognition for our continuous efforts to maintain the existing peace, stability and prosperity.

We are therefore confident that draft resolution A/53/L.41, which was introduced this morning by our colleague, the Ambassador of Argentina, on behalf of the States members of the zone, will receive overwhelming support. We are proud to note that Benin will host the next ministerial meeting. This will afford us the valuable opportunity to take stock of our achievements and to follow up on projects decided on at the fifth ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires.

Mr. Yacoubou (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation is pleased to participate in this debate on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic. It welcomes the Secretary-General's report in document A/53/488, entitled "Zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic", and more specifically the interest shown by the various bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system in the activities in this zone.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its thanks to the Government of the Argentine Republic for the well-organized meeting held in Buenos Aires on 21 and 22 October 1998, and especially for the important decisions which emerged from that meeting, which should be implemented in order to make the zone an active area of cooperation to the great benefit of its peoples on both sides of the South Atlantic.

My delegation and the authorities of my country attach great importance to the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, which represents a special framework of cooperation and development which are very useful to the African and Latin American countries of the zone.

I am convinced that this zone, thanks to the efficient implementation of the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Rarotonga and Bangkok, will facilitate the denuclearization of the southern hemisphere. It thus of the greatest importance to my delegation that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the objectives agreed upon at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons be unanimously agreed to by all Member States.

As part of the efforts undertaken for peace and sustainable development, in particular in the countries of the zone, urgent and appropriate measures should be taken to stem the flow of light arms and small weapons which circulate among our people. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the action undertaken in the zone to combat illicit trafficking in conventional weapons. I take pleasure here in referring to the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, which established an essential mechanism in the sphere of regulations governing weapons in the American zone. It is also important to emphasize the initiative undertaken by the heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States by declaring a moratorium on the import, export and production of light weapons.

The President took the Chair.

All these initiatives, which my delegation duly appreciates, should help to restore and consolidate peace in the zone with a view to strengthening its social and economic development. Indeed, my delegation believes that peace in countries of the zone is one of the basic prerequisites for the establishment of a genuine climate of cooperation and the free flow of property and individuals. In this regard, I earnestly hope that peace will return to the African and Latin American countries of the zone which currently face internal and regional difficulties.

The zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic is an important framework for bringing together peoples who share both sides of the South Atlantic and have age-old relations, the beginning of which were marked by the ignoble and painful slave trade. This is the time for the people of the zone together to take responsibility for their past while turning towards mutually advantageous cooperation through the development of dynamic South-South cooperation. That cooperation, which my delegation earnestly desires, should cover the full socio-economic life of member countries. Environment and the marine ecosystem are important aspects. We have the urgent duty to protect and safeguard the ecosystem for future generations by fiercely fighting all forms of pollution and deterioration of our environment. As for the riches of the seas, we should protect these and use them judiciously.

Exchanges of all types should be intensified in the zone. In this regard, my delegation believes that the South Atlantic zone should create an appropriate legal and institutional framework to enable economic protagonists to meet with a view to creating a new dynamic for the exchange of goods and services on both sides of the South Atlantic. These meetings could take the form of trade fairs or other usual commercial enterprises.

In conclusion, I would like to renew, on behalf of the Government of Benin, the commitment made at the third ministerial meeting of the zone, held in Brasilia in 1994, to host the sixth ministerial meeting of our organization in Benin. My country hopes to benefit from the support and the experience of those countries which have hosted previous meetings of the zone and of all member States to hold the sixth ministerial meeting, which will be the first in the next millennium. In this connection, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the valuable cooperation and assistance continuously offered by the Permanent Mission of Argentina.

Finally, my delegation expresses the hope that draft resolution A/53/L.41, of which my country is a sponsor, will be approved by the United Nations Member States by consensus, as has been the case in previous years.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Argentina, who wishes to speak in connection with an amendment to draft resolution A/53/L.41.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina)(*interpretation from Spanish*): Before the vote, I would like to refer briefly to a minor technical correction to draft resolution A/53/L.41, which we have before us. The technical correction has to do with operative paragraph 17. If you would allow me, Sir, I will read this in Spanish at dictation speed.

Paragraph 17 should read:

> "Calls upon the member States to continue their efforts towards the achievement of appropriate regulation of maritime transport of radioactive and toxic wastes, taking into account the interests of coastal States, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the regulations of the International Maritime Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency;".

The purpose of this technical revision is to take account of suggestions made by several friendly countries interested in activities in the zone.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.41 and Corr.1 as orally revised by the delegation of Argentina. A recorded vote has been requested.

Ms. Smith (United Kingdom): We wish to have a clarification of the exact wording of the oral revision. Perhaps the representative of Argentina would read it out again.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I apologize to delegations for perhaps having read out the proposed revision too quickly.

Paragraph 17 should read:

"Calls upon the member States to continue their efforts towards the achievement of appropriate regulation of maritime transport of radioactive and toxic wastes, taking into account the interests of coastal States and in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the regulations of the International Maritime Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency;".

Mr. Richier (France) (*interpretation from French*): I listened closely to the new wording that the Ambassador of Argentina just read out. It was not the same as the technical revisions to the paragraph agreed upon in informal consultations. I ask you, Sir, to give the delegations concerned a brief opportunity to reconsider the issue.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In response to the request of the representative of France, the meeting will be suspended for five minutes so that we can obtain the agreed text, which will enable us quickly to deal with the matter.

The meeting was suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*):I call on the representative of Argentina to read out the final draft of the oral revisions he has introduced with regard to draft resolution A/53/L.41.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I would first like to refer to the error contained in the corrigendum to operative paragraph 10 of draft resolution A/53/L.41. The corrigendum should have corrected the last line of operative paragraph 10 to read:

(spoke in English)

"continued progress being made in the observance of human rights in the country".

(spoke in Spanish)

The words "towards full" are eliminated.

Operative paragraph 17 of the draft resolution should read:

"Calls upon the member States of the zone to continue their efforts towards the achievement of appropriate regulation of maritime transport of radioactive and toxic wastes, taking into account the interests of coastal States and in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the regulations of the International Maritime Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency;".

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Shall I take it that the text read by the representative of Argentina is that which was agreed by delegations during the suspension of the meeting?

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The text of the draft resolution is now complete. The Assembly can now proceed to a recorded vote on draft resolution A/53/L.41 and Corr.1 as orally revised.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United Republic

of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia

Against:
None

Abstaining:
United States of America

The draft resolution as orally revised was adopted by 126 votes to none, with 1 abstention (resolution 53/34).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Guyana informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I shall now call on those representatives who wish to explain their votes. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Zipper (France) (*interpretation from French*): France has voted with the other member States of the European Union in favour of resolution 53/34. In particular, it supports fully the paragraphs regarding Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone.

However, we would like to recall our traditional reservations on the concept of zones of peace in general, taking into account the problems presented by the geographic demarcation of such zones, the exact nature of resulting obligations for States and the questions pertaining to respect for international law, particularly those having to do with the law of the sea and international airspace.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic should not be incorporated into a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Mr. Pell (United States): The United States once again abstained from voting on this resolution because of the belief that internationally recognized zones should be created through multilateral regional forums and not through United Nations resolutions.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to conclude its consideration of agenda item 32?

It was so decided.

Agenda items 58 and 60

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/170)

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Mr. Belk (United States of America): Today the Assembly is considering two agenda items which are part of the larger process of United Nations reform, that is, of Member States' strategic management of the Organization.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Work on "Strengthening of the United Nations system" — agenda item 58 — has delivered, over three years, views and agreement on almost 100 measures for improving the Secretariat and the General Assembly. "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly" — agenda item 60 — has over the years rationalized the structure of this body.

Indeed, the United Nations system has been strengthened in its capacity for effectiveness. From 1994-1995 the United Nations budget is down $100 million, and staffing has been cut 14 per cent to about 8,700 posts. As a package, the many measures together have enabled the Secretary-General to advance the track 2 reform packages under consideration under agenda item 30, "United Nations reform: measures and proposals".

What have been the objectives advanced in this new culture of reform? Secretariat streamlining; administrative-cost reductions as a "dividend for development" programme; authority delegation, with more accountability expected of programme managers; simpler procedures and rules; stronger United Nations staff through improved human resources management; expanded common services; "high-tech" information technology; and the establishment of a strong financial base.

All told, the Organization is working smarter and harder, and must maintain a level of fitness to be able to rise to the tasks which a dynamic world continues to create.

The world brings those tasks to the United Nations attention most often through the universal,

intergovernmental parliament: the General Assembly. Revitalization of the work of the Assembly is an ongoing duty for all interested in having a place where they might turn goals into reality.

Delegations' time together at the Assembly is a valuable resource which reform has recognized and managed. This fifty-third session of the Assembly took a historic step to modify its calendar, with very beneficial results. The general debate was accomplished in two weeks instead of three, as decided, without any missteps. This meant that more high-level officials were together in New York doing their work. Also, various security and other "VIP" services were concentrated within a smaller time frame, saving time for delegations and the Organization. The saved week was put to effective use by the Assembly's Bureau in organizing more deliberately the work programme for the entire session. This autumn, thanks to your leadership, Mr. President, the Main Committees appear to be accomplishing their duties in record time.

Other aspects could include reviewing the effectiveness of the current main committee structure now that several years have passed since a regrouping of portfolios among them, analyzing the extent to which the Assembly's expert bodies work together with other States and fixing more definitively the starting date of each session, taking into account the host country national holiday in September.

We also have before us the report of the Secretary-General on "Arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system". The United States has been an active participant as Member States have considered the role of non-governmental organizations in the United Nations over the last several years. Indeed, the effective participation of civil society has been recognized as part of the foundation of development.

My delegation continues strongly to support ensuring an appropriate role for civil society at the United Nations while safeguarding the intergovernmental nature of the Organization. Expanding the access of non-governmental organizations to the General Assembly, its Main Committees and special sessions will enrich the spirit of the United Nations and will more accurately attest to its Charter opening, "We the peoples". It is my delegation's firm belief that this can be achieved with improved non-governmental organization accreditation procedures and increased NGO accountability.

Many Governments are now seeking increased collaboration with non-governmental organizations. The United Nations, once the leader in this area, is now lagging behind. This Organization needs to enlist non-governmental organizations as partners in advancing its work and its goals. The many contributions of non-governmental organizations, at the national and international levels, need to be fully recognized and taken into account. Therefore, we welcome the Secretary-General's call for the Organization to develop a partnership with non-governmental organizations. The Secretary-General's report entitled "Arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system" makes it clear that non-governmental organizations are currently participating in a multitude of issues covered by various United Nations programmes. For instance, the World Bank has developed extensive dialogue with non-governmental organizations through the historical participation of non-governmental organizations in operational work, and has most recently increased non-governmental-organization involvement in project preparation.

While this report is a useful input into our deliberations, it does not completely fulfil the mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General. The report does not cover arrangements, United Nations organs and bodies comprehensively. Further, the views and experience of the non-governmental organizations are important inputs as well. We would hope that the report could serve as the basis for further work and that comments from United Nations entities as well as from non-governmental organizations will be solicited for a more comprehensive report for the consideration of the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

We look forward to considering these issues in more depth with colleagues during this session.

Mr. Manz (Austria): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area — Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway — align themselves with this statement.

As the President of the General Assembly helpfully outlined in his letter to all delegations last week, the Assembly has to address today a number of issues remaining from its earlier, very substantial work done under agenda items 58 and 60. It is with the long history of our negotiations and the resulting achievements in mind that the European Union would like to offer the following comments on these issues, taking them in the order in which they are listed in the annex to the President's letter.

The European Union welcomes the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system", requested by the General Assembly in its decision 52/453. It provides us, on the one hand, with a thorough overview of past and proven, as well as ongoing, institutional arrangements guiding the relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, it provides us with a set of suggestions on how to enhance the participation of non-governmental organizations throughout the United Nations system. The report clearly offers some food for thought and merits our careful consideration.

We applaud the Secretary-General's efforts to upgrade the services offered by the Secretariat to non-governmental organizations, including the designation of non-governmental-organization liaison officers in each department of the Secretariat and the revival or creation of Inter-Departmental Working Groups on non-governmental organizations in New York and Geneva.

However, the European Union would welcome increased importance being attached to the participation of civil society in the work of the Organization, not least with a view to the preparations for the Millennium Assembly. We are in favour of closer cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the representatives of civil society and would like to ensure the possibility of non-governmental organizations having a greater input in our work.

I would now like to turn to the next issue we have before us. As regards the opening and closing dates of regular sessions, the European Union recognizes the need for the General Assembly to take a decision that will allow these dates to be established automatically. In doing so, we should draw on the experience of the current regular session, the first organized according to the consensus reached in the Assembly's Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations system.

In our view, the decision to open the regular session one week earlier, as modified for practical purposes by resolution 52/232 for the current session, has been proved correct. The new arrangement has undoubtedly allowed the Assembly to make better use of its time to the benefit of its substantial considerations. The European Union would therefore like to see the interim measure made permanent. The regular session of the General Assembly would thus be opened on the Wednesday following the first Monday in September and closed on the Tuesday following the first Monday in September of the subsequent year.

The European Union also feels that the length and timing of the general debate, as adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/241 — as well as the decision, contained in that same resolution, according to which the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should be available not later than 30 days prior to the opening of the regular session of the General Assembly — should be maintained as well.

In paragraph 12 of its resolution 48/264 the General Assembly decided to review at its fifty-third session the arrangement concerning the pattern of election of the six Chairmen of the Main Committees. In our view, the pattern of election decided upon in that resolution continues to meet the requirements of the Assembly very well. The European Union would therefore support a decision to review this arrangement again at the fifty-eighth session of the Assembly.

Given that we are dealing here with two agenda items whose consideration can be regarded as substantially if not completely concluded, and that, furthermore, both items deal with aspects of United Nations reform, the European Union would like to propose that these items be merged with item 30. This would allow further consideration of the remaining issues while contributing a little to streamlining the agenda of the General Assembly.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): We attach great importance to the revitalization of the General Assembly, which, in our view, is a key element in the ongoing reform efforts. We believe that there is a continuing need to revitalize the General Assembly both internally and in terms of increasing its interaction with the other principal United Nations organs, in particular with the Security Council. The General Assembly, as mandated by the United Nations Charter, also has a key role to play in the maintenance of international peace and security. It must,

in our view, assert that role. This is especially important inasmuch as the General Assembly remains the only principal United Nations organ with universal membership and where the principle of sovereign equality among States is respected and observed. It is the only principal United Nations organ where all 185 Member States equally and democratically participate in the decision-making process.

The revitalization of the General Assembly — that is, enabling it to function in the manner intended by the founding fathers of the United Nations — would affirm mankind's commitment not only to promoting democracy within nations but also to promoting democracy among nations. We must therefore continue this process of revitalizing the General Assembly in an open and transparent manner.

The General Assembly, in paragraph 12 of resolution 48/264, decided to review the arrangement concerning the pattern of election of the six Chairmen of the Main Committees at the current session. Annex II to resolution 48/264 contains these arrangements over a period of 20 sessions, beginning at the forty-ninth session. We are, in general, satisfied with the current arrangements and would favour their continuation.

While the General Assembly, in paragraph 17 of the annex to resolution 51/241, decided that its regular session would open on the first Tuesday following 1 September, it was decided that the fifty-third session would open on Wednesday, 9 September. This was to avoid any financial implications that would have been caused by the closure of the previous session on a Monday that was a United Nations holiday.

At the current session, a number of issues concerning the organization of work of the regular sessions of the General Assembly remain pending and need to be addressed. We hope that proposals in this regard will be considered in an open and transparent manner and that Member States will be given sufficient time to study these proposals.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system (A/53/170), submitted in response to the request of the General Assembly in its decision 52/453.

The information on existing arrangements and practices is comprehensive and demonstrates the extensive collaboration between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. However, we note that the issues of legal and financial implications of modifying the current arrangements for non-governmental organization participation, with a view to enhancing their participation in all areas of the United Nations system, and the question of the participation of non-governmental organizations from all regions, particularly from developing countries, have not been adequately addressed.

The report, however, contains some interesting recommendations on enhancing the participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries, in particular, the establishment of a trust fund. The report could also have benefited from the inclusion of views of non-governmental organizations, particularly those from developing countries. It would also be useful as a next step for the Secretariat to undertake wider consultations among the Member States, non-governmental organizations and other interested actors, on which an expanded or revised report could be issued.

Ms. McVey (Canada): My delegation is honoured to speak on agenda item 58, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system", and specifically on the Secretary-General's report on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system (A/53/170).

The Assembly will recall that during its fifty-first session, a special sub-group of the High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations system held a first round of discussions on the issue of participation of non-governmental organizations in the United Nations system. This sub-group emphasized the importance of making early progress on this question and recommended further consideration of the matter during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The General Assembly subsequently adopted decision 52/453, entitled "Non-governmental organizations" to examine the broader question of the participation of non-governmental organizations in all work of the United Nations system.

General Assembly decision 52/453 reflected the balance of different views on how best to address the question of non-governmental organization participation in all areas of the work of the United Nations. At that time, it was recognized by all that the achievement of significant, enduring progress on this issue, which all participating delegations affirmed was their wish, could

best be achieved on a sound foundation of relevant information and analysis.

In this vein, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system". It constitutes an important step in providing that much-needed foundation of pertinent information and analysis in the process of follow-up to the 1996 recommendation of the Economic and Social Council, presented on completion of its comprehensive review of consultative arrangements between non-governmental organizations and the Council.

The report before us today presents a good overview of existing institutional arrangements and makes specific recommendations on enhancing the participation of non-governmental organizations. We find particularly interesting the recommendation for appointment of liaison officers to share best practices and experiences with a view to promoting coherence and efficiency, and to ensure proper implementation of existing mandates and rules. Also, the proposal for consideration of the establishment of a trust fund for the purpose of facilitating the participation of non-governmental organizations from developing and least developed countries and countries in transition merits further study.

We applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General to present delegations with a coherent report that highlights existing institutional arrangements and the increase in interaction between non-governmental organizations, Governments and the United Nations system. However, my delegation also recognizes that the task set before the Secretary-General was not a simple one and that, given more time, the report would have been more comprehensive.

In the coming days, my delegation will examine this report more carefully and the recommendations contained therein. It is the intention of the Canadian delegation to consult as widely as possible with delegations and other interested parties to sound out views as to the best course of action in the process of follow-up. We look forward to working with all those interested and hope that we can achieve a consensus on what is to be done.

Mr. Chinade (Nigeria): Please allow me to join those who have taken the podium before me to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his election as President of the General Assembly and to commend him for the able manner in which he has conducted the proceedings at the current session.

I wish to state from the beginning that my delegation fully endorses the position of the Group of 77 and China on reinforcing the United Nations for the challenges of the new millennium. There is a need to ensure that the reform process under way is carried out with the primary objectives of strengthening the capacity of our Organization to address critical development issues and to respond promptly and effectively to the development needs of developing countries, in fulfilment of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. It is therefore necessary that, as an essential part of the reform process, the Organization needs to review and update the ways in which it interacts with non-governmental organizations and civil society at large.

My delegation attaches great importance to the strengthening of the role of our Organization in the promotion of international cooperation for the socio-economic development of Member States, especially the developing and least developed ones. The United Nations must be given the opportunity and encouragement to develop its fullest potential towards the attainment of these objectives.

Last year this Assembly, by decision 52/453, agreed to narrow our discussion on this subject at this session to the Secretary-General's report on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system. At this juncture, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for his detailed and comprehensive report which has been placed before us.

My delegation believes that this agenda item should be considered through an open, frank and transparent procedure, in which all delegations participate actively. The emergence of non-State actors, as exemplified by non-governmental organizations, is a feature of the changing international environment. Non-governmental organizations and civil society have taken on an increasingly important role in shaping the world scene for sustainable growth and the well-being of peoples.

The number of non-governmental organizations granted different categories of consultative status by the Economic and Social Council has been on the increase over the years. Their long history of association with the United Nations in the fields of environment, development, human rights, humanitarian assistance and

the status of women has been of immense benefit to mankind. Their involvement in development activities, mostly at the grass-roots level, has been equally critical in the pursuit of the goal of poverty alleviation, capacity-building and transfer of resources from developed to developing countries. Their operational competence, flexibility and knowledge of local conditions make them valuable partners in the delivery of humanitarian programmes and development. In this regard, they are contributing to a process of expanding international cooperation through the grassroots. They are present in all United Nations conferences at which multilateral agreements are negotiated.

The advantages of the increased participation of non-governmental organizations in United Nations activities are many. They have introduced additional knowledge and information into the decision-making process. They have raised new issues and, most importantly, they have provided expert advice in their areas of competence.

However, like all human institutions, some of them have demonstrated evidence of overzealousness in pushing issues of particular interest to their cause. Furthermore, the institutional weaknesses of some others and the divergent positions among them and between them and Governments, especially in developing countries, constitute irritants in their interaction with others. At the local level, their occasional overdependence on foreign donors at times poses a justifiable threat to national security.

It is a fact that the number of non-governmental organizations from developing countries in consultation with the Economic and Social Council is small indeed. This imbalance must be addressed and efforts already under way to provide financial assistance to them in order to facilitate their participation in United Nations policy-making decisions, especially those affecting countries of the South, must be sustained. Participation in such conferences, seminars and other forums will not only help them to establish useful links and networks with their counterparts from the North, but will also contribute to their capacity-building efforts. It also ensures their greater contribution to the policy-making process.

On enhancing the participation of the non-governmental organizations in all areas of the United Nations system, it is the view of my delegation that the existing relationship between them and United Nations organs, programmes and funds is satisfactory. By virtue of this relationship, the non-governmental organizations have acquired certain rights and responsibilities which have facilitated the effective performance of their respective mandates. Their access to information and United Nations documents should be guaranteed, subject to the limitations of the Organization's budget. My delegation is convinced that the Secretariat will continue to adopt and find acceptable solutions to these minor constraints.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased to speak on this very important subject today. My remarks will be limited to two important subjects: the role of the non-governmental organizations and the opening dates for the regular sessions of the General Assembly.

Egypt believes in the important role of the non-governmental organizations in enhancing and disseminating the purposes and principles of the United Nations. While we welcome in this connection the report of the Secretary-General on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system, we would also like to offer some comments that we hope will enrich the current dialogue on this very important subject.

First, it is clear from the section of the Secretary-General's report on existing arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system that the Organization, despite its growing relations with all these organizations, still lacks the appropriate standardized legal and institutional framework to define the type and nature of those relations. The contribution of non-governmental organizations is still based on personal efforts that remain non-institutional, which in turn deprives them of a great deal of their importance.

Secondly, there is confusion in the interpretation of the nature of the relations between the United Nations, with all its agencies and bodies on the one hand, and the non-governmental organizations on the other. Is this relationship one of collaboration, of participation, of interaction or of mere presence? In this connection, we believe it essential to define the nature of this relationship in order to facilitate the design of the necessary institutional, legal and financial framework.

Thirdly, the report does not address the legal and financial implications of any change in the existing arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations, especially since these arrangements are, at present, limited to their relations with the Economic and Social Council. This does not accord with our view or

that of other countries on the need to expand the participation of non-governmental organizations to include all their work in the activities of the entire United Nations system.

Fourthly, unfortunately, the report refers to the poor participation of non-governmental organizations from the South in the work and activities of the United Nations. While we welcome the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a trust fund to finance this participation, we think it is necessary to focus on raising awareness and enhancing the linkages between these organizations and the United Nations by means of an integrated educational and information programme in developing countries that would identify the concept and raise awareness of the consultative status of the non-governmental organizations in the Economic and Social Council. Such a programme would also identify the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Fifthly, paragraph 34 of the report refers to the

> "constraints or potential difficulties which limit the scope of United Nations collaboration with non-governmental organizations. They lie principally in the sheer number of organizations and their diversity, their occasional organizational weaknesses". (*A/53/170, para. 34*)

The report goes on to state that

> "over-dependence on external financing can sometimes undermine the sustainability and even independence of non-governmental organizations". (*ibid.*)

In this connection, we would affirm the fact that the job of enhancing relations between the United Nations and the non-governmental organizations does not fall to Member States alone, but must also be the responsibility of those organizations themselves. They must codify their status, maintain their independence and stress and prove to the Member States the importance of their role to the United Nations and its Member States.

In conclusion, I wish once again to reiterate the importance that Egypt attaches to the role of the non-governmental organizations and to sound relations between them and the United Nations. This was demonstrated by the participation of Egypt's First Lady in the annual conference of non-governmental organizations convened by the United Nations Department of Public Information, held in September this year in conjunction with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With regard to the opening dates for the regular session of the General Assembly, Egypt believes, along with other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, that we must consider General Assembly resolution 52/232 of 4 June 1998 to be an exception to rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which states that "The General Assembly shall meet every year in regular session commencing on the third Tuesday in September". We believe it necessary to adhere to the rules of procedure on the opening and closing dates for the session so as to maintain continuity and to allow for proper advance planning of the work of the session, thus enhancing the effective functioning of the General Assembly. This is particularly important in the light of this year's experience, in which the period between the opening of the session and the general debate was used only by the Main Committees. This experience can be useful only if the session is held in accordance with its regular schedule, given the importance of rationalization, without amending the rules of procedure and prior practice.

Mr. Zmeevski (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Ideas for enhancing cooperation between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are making headway, including in the context of implementing reforms of our Organization. The Russian Federation takes an active part in all United Nations arrangements related to involvement of non-governmental organizations in United Nations activities, based on the need for a comprehensive and balanced analysis of all aspects of strengthening cooperation between those organizations and the United Nations. From this standpoint, the delegation of the Russian Federation supported decision 52/453 of 19 December 1997, which included a request that the Secretary-General prepare a report. Today we note with satisfaction that the document submitted by the Secretary-General has, to a great extent, justified our hopes.

The report, in a very balanced and comprehensive manner, analyses the background and the current status of a whole series of issues regarding relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations and examines prospects for their development. It convincingly demonstrates that the successful cooperation between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations can be explained in large measure by the

presence throughout its history of clear-cut regulatory mechanisms which enable the non-governmental organizations to harmonize their initiatives and steps while observing the necessary procedural aspects, ensuring stability for the United Nations and preserving its inter-State character.

Bearing in mind this historical experience and supporting conceptual approaches by a number of countries to the need for further development of the potential for constructive interaction with non-governmental organizations, we believe it necessary to coordinate this process closely with the strengthening and improvement of the relevant mechanisms for consultation with those organizations. An even-handed and gradual approach should, we believe, underlie our decisions for more promising areas of deeper cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations. In this connection, we believe the preliminary request for the views of possible partners in cooperation regarding the advisability of establishing firmer relations in concrete areas to be extremely useful and necessary.

We believe that enhancing partnership between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations must be carried out in strict observance of the United Nations Charter and must enhance its inter-State nature.

An important element for success is a comprehensive study on ensuring the principle of equitable geographical representation of non-governmental organizations from all regions. It is not by chance that this is emphasized in decision 52/453. The fact that many States and non-governmental organizations find themselves far from the centre of United Nations activities should not be an obstacle to fully considering their views and approaches on various problems and documents. Would not the international community gain if, for example, in addition to the statements of States on the report we are considering today, we also would have appraisals by non-governmental organizations, even those from the most distant countries?

It would also be appropriate to continue to strengthen the relationship between possible involvement of specific non-governmental organizations in United Nations activities and their competence in issues under discussion on specific areas of United Nations activity. This, no doubt, would help to strengthen the real contribution of non-governmental organizations to United Nations activities and would help deepen their involvement in the Organization. A search for new forms of partnership with non-governmental organizations presupposes strengthening United Nations responsibilities in this process, including enhancing the authorization for overall policy and coordination for the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.

In conclusion, the Russian delegation would like once again to emphasize that the Secretary-General is correct with regard to the existence of various financial and legal consequences of expanding cooperation between the United Nations and non-governmental organization. These will require further careful study and discussion. That way we can have more effective and forward-looking forms of cooperation.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda items 58 and 60.

Agenda item 30 (*continued*)

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/463, A/53/676)

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/52/849, A/52/850, A/52/851 and Corr.1 and Add.1)

Mr. Manz (Austria): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the President's letter dated 17 November 1998, with which he informed all delegations about the issues before us under agenda item 30. The European Union strongly feels that at this stage of our consideration of agenda item 30 we should focus on the Secretary-General's report on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), since this is the first time we are in a position to address this particular issue in substance.

Before going into more detail on this report, I should like to outline the EU's position as to what we

would see as the best way to proceed on the other issues mentioned in the President's letter. The Secretary-General's report on the implementation of actions related to United Nations reform (A/53/676) was regrettably not issued in time to allow us to consider it today. Given that delegations will have to study it in detail, we do not expect that useful debate on the progress achieved since the adoption of resolution 52/12 A will be possible before the end of this regular session.

As regards the Millennium Assembly, the time has come to start a process that will allow us to make this a truly significant event. The European Union believes that the Millennium Assembly provides us with a unique opportunity to show what the United Nations can do. We strongly support this effort to mark the millennium and must make it a success.

We believe we should use the Millennium Assembly to address the United Nations' role in the twenty-first century by focusing on a few clearly defined areas in which the Organization can make a real difference. While the European Union has not yet finalized its proposals for specific themes, it has a clear preference to giving priority to the economic and social area. We must further ensure that the Assembly does not overshadow the special sessions also due to take place in the year 2000.

We should consider innovatively and flexibly the way in which the Millennium Assembly is prepared. This will require much thought by both the delegations and the Secretary-General. The European Union would therefore like to propose that we start this process in the well-tested format of informal meetings of the plenary, to be chaired by the President of the General Assembly. We would very much welcome a first meeting in this format before the end of this regular session.

With the report on environment and human settlements and the Millennium Assembly taking a certain priority, the remaining issues under agenda item 30 should be considered at a later stage.

Let me turn now to the main issue at hand and start by thanking the Secretary-General for his report on environment and human settlements. In this context, we would like to highly commend the work of the Task Force under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Mr. Klaus Toepfer. The European Union considers the report to be a first significant step paving the way for further analysis and reform of United Nations-wide activities in the environmental and human settlement areas.

The European Union attaches great importance to the development of a stronger and better coordinated approach by the United Nations system in the field of environment and human settlements. The structural integration of the environmental dimension in all United Nations policies and activities should be further promoted at all levels. We see the recommendations of the Task Force as a significant step in this direction.

The proposed actions and recommendations of the report should be considered in the framework of the United Nations system as a whole. In this context, the European Union would like to emphasize again the importance it attaches to achieving the highest possible level of system-wide cooperation and coordination within the United Nations, including with respect to new structures now in place.

Let me first address the recommendations for actions at the Secretariat level. The European Union fully respects the prerogatives of the Secretary-General and therefore welcomes the fact that he is going to implement many of the recommendations contained in the report of the Task Force under his own mandate, and it fully supports his efforts to this end. We would like to see a general endorsement by the General Assembly of those recommendations. This process should be supported and accompanied by the internal reform of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

We welcome in principle the establishment of an environmental management group as a means to better coordinate and integrate environmental issues and aspects within the United Nations system. The European Union trusts that the setting up of this group will be based on carefully drafted terms of reference. Due consideration should also be given to the compatibility with existing United Nations coordination mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, so as to ensure full complementarity with the work of these bodies and to avoid unnecessary overlapping and duplication.

The European Union supports the proposals to strengthen UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi. UNEP and Habitat should remain distinct entities while enjoying the benefits of

synergy deriving from Mr. Toepfer's role as joint Director and closer links in the joint planning and implementation of certain activities within the two organizations, as well as the shared facilities of the United Nations Office at Nairobi. In creating such synergy, it is of great importance to clarify as soon as possible the new role of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. In this process it is important to define complementary roles and fields of intervention for UNEP and the Centre, avoid overlap and streamline both organizations in a parallel way. The European Union welcomes the fact that the ongoing revision of the Centre's organizational structure and substantive role seems to have reached a decisive stage, and equally welcomes the fact that both the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) report of 1997 and the four-country assessment form the basis for the revision.

We would like to stress the importance of a corporate image for UNEP and Habitat, as a means of internal cohesion-building and external recognizability. In this respect, and also on many other elements of the ongoing reform of both UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the European Union would like to see the Executive Director take into account the many valuable recommendations, for instance by OIOS and the four-country assessment to which I referred earlier, on UNEP management and organization.

The European Union welcomes the idea of a joint financial strategy, provided it is flexible enough to respond to emerging problems. In developing a joint financial strategy, the outcome of similar exercises in other funds and programmes should be taken into account. The European Union looks forward to the proposals to be presented to the governing bodies. In order to attain an adequate, stable and predictable financial basis and to attract funds from a larger number of donors, these proposals should, however, be wide-ranging and address a broader spectrum of elements than those contained in recommendation 8 of the Task Force. The financial implications of these proposals should be made clear before they can be properly considered.

The Union welcomes the proposal to assess the possibility of co-locating the regional offices of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and UNEP, and would like to extend the scope to a possible co-location with other organizations and institutions within the United Nations system, especially the planned United Nations Houses, as well as with those outside it.

The European Union welcomes the intention of the Secretary-General to take up consultations with the Government of Kenya with a view to improving physical security. Only if the security situation improves will the likelihood of strengthening the United Nations presence in Nairobi increase.

As to the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report on future initiatives, the European Union supports the idea of wide-ranging consultations concerning institutional arrangements for dealing with the environmental challenges of the next century.

The European Union supports the recommendations on the issue of information, monitoring, assessment and early warning. This surely is an area where UNEP should be building up its strengths. In this respect, the European Union was concerned to learn about the proposed withdrawal of UNEP's funding from the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, based in Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

The recommendation on maximizing the ability of Habitat and UNEP to provide early warning of emergencies should be implemented in cooperation with relevant parts of the United Nations, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In case the recommendations on strengthening information, monitoring and assessment capacities and activities cannot be fully implemented because of budgetary constraints, the Governing Council should take responsibility for setting realistic and achievable priorities for the work programme.

Let me now turn to the recommendations for action by the intergovernmental bodies, starting with those concerning linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions.

The European Union supports increased and improved coordination between the various global and regional environmental and environment-related conventions and their secretariats with a view to easing the burden for developing countries to comply with the obligations under these conventions. Governments should support this aim by making additional efforts to achieve consistency and coherence of national positions in different intergovernmental forums. UNEP has an important role to play in supporting better interaction between the conventions and in improving the secretariats. We welcome the recommendations in this respect. The proposal to locate new conventions in

functional clusters deserves our attention. However, as regards existing conventions and, in the longer term, the negotiation of umbrella conventions, the proposals of the report require further consideration, taking into account the status of the conventions as distinct legal entities and their legal relationship to other United Nations bodies, as well as their nature as environmental conventions.

The European Union supports the main thrust of the proposals by the Secretary-General to strengthen UNEP and its Governing Council. The roles and relationships of the different forums of the intergovernmental structure of UNEP as the proposed global ministerial-level forum — the UNEP Governing Council, the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials and the Committee of Permanent Representatives — have to be clearly defined before any decision can be taken. The Governing Council has already decided that the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials should be reviewed in 2001. This review of the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials will have to be taken into account in the light of a possible global environmental forum. In the relationship between the proposed ministerial forum, the high-level segments of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and of the conferences of parties to environmental conventions, special attention should be devoted to avoiding unnecessary duplications and institutional overlap. The role of CSD as the main forum for the high-level policy debate on sustainable development should be maintained in any new arrangement.

As regards UNEP, the increasing importance of global environmental issues that concern all countries would seem to merit increased participation at the ministerial level at Governing Council meetings. However, the proposed universal membership of the UNEP Governing Council does not seem to be a step in the right direction, as it would make decision-making more difficult and reduce the efficiency of the Governing Council. In any case, under current UNEP rules, every State, as well as non-governmental organizations, can attend as an observer and participate in discussions.

From our point of view, the major objectives of any reform of the intergovernmental structure should be to ensure an effective and efficient governance of UNEP, to establish a forum for meaningful policy debates on environmental issues and to attract ministerial level participation. To this end, various options, including the proposed ministerial forum, should be considered.

As to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the European Union sees a need for continuous substantial reform, in particular with regard to its administrative and financial management. The Union welcomes the recommendations aiming at building the capacity of the Centre to facilitate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, particularly by strengthening the normative core activities of Habitat, and at assisting the Commission on Human Settlements in its role of monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. When implementing this recommendation, paragraph 228 of the Habitat Agenda, which defines the responsibilities of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, as well as paragraphs 207 and 208, dealing with its catalytic role in technical cooperation activities, should be borne in mind.

We welcome the recommendations relating to a stronger involvement and a broader spectrum of major groups, especially the further involvement of non-governmental organizations, in the work of UNEP and Habitat. The European Union would like to stress the importance of a strong involvement of local authorities and also of private sector and non-governmental organization representatives as key players in the management of urban settlements in Habitat's work.

In the process of reforming United Nations organizations dealing with environmental and human settlements issues, it is important to ensure that due resources are allocated in order to implement the Platform for Action of the Beijing Conference within the activities of these organizations.

As to the recommendations concerning the Global Environment Facility (GEF), we support the recommendations of the Secretary-General to strengthen UNEP's role, within its sphere of competence, in providing environmental advocacy, analysis and advice to shape GEF priorities and programmes consistent with UNEP's envisaged role in the GEF instrument.

Let me conclude by commending the report as a first significant step which paves the way for further analysis and reform of United Nations-wide activities in the environmental and human settlements areas. This should include a clear assessment of the normative and operational tasks of the main agencies in these fields and be in line with Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda. Further thought will also have to be given to the better integration of environmental issues at all levels in the

whole United Nations system, as well as to the issue of financing of global environmental issues.

Ms. Montoya (United States of America): I would like to note at the outset that I am limiting my statement to issues related to reform in the areas of environment and human settlements.

The United States supports efforts to improve programme quality and delivery in the environmental sector. We welcome the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements and wish to express our appreciation to the members of the Task Force, to its Advisers, and to its secretariat. Under the chairmanship of Mr. Klaus Toepfer, these individuals reviewed the environmental function within the United Nations system and have identified areas where economies, synergies and additional focus can be achieved. They have made a number of useful suggestions for reform. We realize that this will be an ongoing process and hope that efforts to implement these recommendations will focus on those areas where real efficiencies can be achieved.

In tandem with the Task Force's work, Mr. Toepfer has pursued internal reform of the organizations in Nairobi. The United Nations Office at Nairobi has now assumed responsibility for all administrative services for both the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) with the prospect of significant savings which can be applied to programme activities. We are also extremely pleased to note that UNEP is now in the process of undertaking a strategic review of its monitoring and assessment programmes, with the initial results of this process to be considered at the next meeting of the Governing Council.

As the Secretary-General has suggested, some Task Force recommendations require the action of the General Assembly while others do not. Creation of an environmental management group is within the purview of the Secretary-General himself. The United States would support him should he choose to constitute an environmental management group that will take a critical look at environmental issues within the United Nations system. We believe that the group's mandate and reporting responsibilities should be clearly set forth and that useful results should be clearly demonstrated within a reasonable time.

Many Task Force recommendations are for the attention and action of the governing bodies of Habitat and of UNEP. Those recommendations which relate to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements represent a first step in revitalizing the Centre. The United States is encouraged that the Task Force recommendations have served to reinvigorate efforts to find appropriate solutions to overcome the Centre's financial and management problems. We applaud efforts to achieve greater coordination between the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the Centre, in line with the Secretary-General's reform programme.

We are encouraged that implementation of these recommendations will take place in a transparent and consultative manner. We are also pleased that the approach to implementing these recommendations is similar to that of the Secretary-General's reform proposals: delineation of the different levels — secretariat and intergovernmental — at which the decisions and measures are taken. These efforts should provide added impetus to the Centre's ability to provide real leadership on sustainable development in urban areas and on urban environment issues and in achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda.

Other recommendations relate directly to the United Nations Environment Programme. They intersect with UNEP's active internal process of reform and its effort to define top priorities for immediate action. UNEP's mandate is extremely broad and its resources limited. Despite the efforts of a very talented professional staff, some worthy activities on behalf of the environment will necessarily have to be deferred. As UNEP gains strength as an institution, it will be better placed to pursue increased responsibilities and programmes. To the extent that it demonstrates excellence, relevance and cost-effectiveness in its undertakings, UNEP will find its voice as a global environmental authority.

UNEP's ability to provide information, monitoring and assessment represents one of its major assets. This capability is vital in discerning environmental trends and enhancing the scientific underpinning of multilateral environment agreements and negotiations. The United States concurs that improving this capacity is of high priority.

We also endorse efforts, through better coordination, to produce a more coherent global programme in the environmental field. We believe that this effort should, at least initially, focus particular attention on those conventions with current linkages to

UNEP. We further believe that in addition to coordinating substantive environmental issues, continued attention to providing administrative support to those Secretariats is required. One of UNEP's greatest potential contributions to these Conventions is administrative, particularly in reducing costly duplication.

Co-locating conventions that deal with related issues to achieve economies and efficiencies makes financial and management sense. We believe this requires careful and thoughtful planning and should begin with new conventions. We would be unable to support "fusing" convention secretariats, which we believe could confuse administration of other already complex issues.

As the General Assembly turns its attention to those recommendations that require its own action, it will be useful to focus on those suggestions that provide the most positive impact on the environment. The United States believes that an annual ministerial forum, focused on priority environmental issues and conducted in a less formal fashion, can be useful if it has the active support of Governments. Cognizant of ministers' busy travel calendars, the United States believes that the timing of these special sessions should be flexible and take advantage of meetings in other forums..

The Task Force recommends that membership of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council be made universal. Transparency is vital and the United States supports input from all parties in determining the direction of UNEP's programmes. However, we do not believe that this suggestion is demonstrably a priority at this time. The Governing Council is large and representative. Its meetings are now open to the participation of all Governments.

I am grateful for this opportunity to present the United States perspective on this important step in the reform process.

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea): I would like to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for the achievements and progress he has made so far in his United Nations reform initiative.

Today, my delegation takes note with particular satisfaction of the fact that the waves of the reform process have finally reached the shores of environment and human settlements, which require stronger political support and better coordination among Member States. The United Nations has played a central role in elevating the profile of the environmental agenda by organizing the historic global environmental Conferences of 1972 and 1992. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in particular has been the central driving force behind a number of multilateral environmental conventions, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Biodiversity and Basel Conventions.

However, as the environmental agenda has expanded, the task of UNEP has become more complex and requires better coordination between the various institutions involved. Issues such as climate change, biodiversity, desertification, forestry and oceans can no longer be managed by traditional institutional mechanisms. Current environmental issues require system-wide responses by the United Nations, since the environmental agenda permeates the work of various United Nations institutions and cuts across traditional institutional boundaries of existing organs of the Organization. As the environmental issues of the next century are expected to be more interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral in nature, it is necessary for us to be equipped with more versatile and flexible mechanisms for global environmental management.

In this context, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General as a blueprint for environment and human settlements in the twenty-first century. Particularly, we commend the hard work of the Executive Director, Mr. Klaus Toepfer, in preparing the report of the Task Force. We are pleased to note that this report clearly embodies the spirit and consensus expressed in the Nairobi Declaration last year.

The Government of the Republic of Korea agrees with the basic notion of the report that UNEP should continue to play a central role in managing the global environment. In particular, my delegation welcomes the discerning judgement of the Secretary-General in recommending that the actions of the Toepfer report be divided into those to be taken at the Secretariat level and those requiring the approval of Member States. My delegation expects that the various actions to be taken at the Secretariat level — such as providing strong financial and administrative support for UNEP, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the United Nations Office at Nairobi and unifying the administration of their offices at Nairobi — can be carried out immediately under the Secretary-General's clear direction and supervision.

As for the various recommendations contained in the report, my delegation would like to make the following comments.

First, the establishment of the environmental management group, if it is well managed, could make for a versatile and flexible mechanism for coping with the increasingly interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of environmental issues. As the rigid institutional boundaries have already shown their limits in coordinating efficient environmental management, the group could provide a forum for a higher degree of coordination between the top decision makers of various organs involved in global environmental issues. As UNEP cannot tackle alone the newly emerging global environmental agendas, it is expected to play a more dynamic role of mobilizing United Nations system-wide synergy. The Executive Director of UNEP should play a key role in operating the group and in producing a consolidated global environmental management strategy for the United Nations. It could be operated in a flexible manner, according to the issues to be considered and involving only relevant institutions without creating additional bureaucracy. My delegation believes that the establishment and operation of the group could be managed within existing resources.

Secondly, the linking of environmental conventions is another important long-term issue that requires vision and strategy. During the 1980s and 1990s, we have witnessed a proliferation of environmental conventions that have significantly contributed to strengthening the legal regime for global environmental management. However, the proliferation of conventions has also resulted in the proliferation of convention secretariats and conferences of parties, thus creating a situation where each convention is competing with the others to secure a larger portion of limited financial resources from the parties to the conventions. As the number of conventions increases, the situation makes it increasingly unmanageable to implement the various conventions in a coordinated manner. For this reason, my delegation welcomes the recommendations for coordinating and clustering environmental conventions as a meaningful step in the right direction. For the time being, the drafting of an umbrella convention could be considered only as a long-term objective. However, my delegation believes that there is considerable potential for synchronizing the timing, agenda and programmes among related environmental conventions for better coordinated implementation of the objectives of each convention.

In this regard, my delegation supports the joint meetings between the Executive Director of UNEP and heads of secretariats of conventions, as well as meetings between the President of UNEP's Governing Council and the presidents of the conferences of parties, as useful measures for improving the synchronization and sequencing of environmental convention implementation. These meetings may produce better synergy and coordination while minimizing overlap and duplication. However, my delegation believes that these two categories of meetings, one representing the secretariats and the other representing Member States parties to various conventions, should subsequently be integrated and merged into one — also for even greater synergy and coordination.

Thirdly, the holding of a ministerial Global Environment Forum and the universal membership of the UNEP Governing Council deserve our careful consideration. My delegation believes that such a formula could reinforce environmental awareness and broaden the foundations of political support for UNEP. In particular, the suggestion to move the Forum from one region to another will contribute to decentralizing and bringing global environmental management closer to the public in many regions of the world.

However, efforts must be made to avoid overlap and duplication between the role of the Global Environment Forum and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). As long as environment ministers dominate the high-level segment of the CSD as they do now, the Global Environment Forum will inevitably risk duplicating the high-level segment of the CSD. In order to transform the new Global Forum into a genuine environment ministers' meeting while strengthening the CSD as a sustainable development forum which encompasses environmental, social and economic agendas, the high-level segment of the CSD should be attended not only by environment ministers but also by ministers in charge of economic and social policies. My delegation believes that this cannot happen without political commitment and consensus-building among Member States.

Making a clear distinction between the agendas of the CSD and the Global Environment Forum at the global level may not be such an easy task, unless there is at the national level a well-functioning coordination between sustainable development and environmental management.

Fourthly, my delegation fully supports the strengthening of UNEP's capacity for monitoring, assessing and providing competent scientific and technical

advice, necessary for global environmental management. UNEP should remain as the central body capable of providing authoritative environmental information on various environmental fronts such as climate, ozone, biodiversity, desertification, toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes, oceans, forestry and ecosystem management.

Fifthly, as for the role of Habitat, it should present a credible and convincing work programme in order to faithfully execute its mandate. We take note of the activities of its revitalization team, and we would like to review the findings of the team in deciding the direction Habitat will take in future.

The report on environment and human settlements of the United Nations Task Force will serve as a basis for revitalizing the United Nations system-wide response for global environmental management. However, it will be only a first step in the long-term process of developing a new institutional framework for the environment.

My delegation suggests that the Secretary-General be requested to submit a progress report to the next session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report.

Finally, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its willingness to contribute to a new global environmental architecture for the twenty-first century.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): New Zealand considers this item to be one of the most important on the agenda of the General Assembly during this regular session. It was therefore with increasing concern that we continued to await the appearance of the report in document A/53/676 as the appointed day for the debate in plenary approached. In fact, the report was not received in my mission until the day before yesterday, 23 November, the day the debate was scheduled to begin. This simply is not good enough, and we would appreciate an explanation from the Secretariat.

The lack of time to consider the report has meant that we have not been able to give it the kind of in-depth study that is desirable. But we would like to offer the following observations.

Overall the report before us is something of an unsatisfactory hodgepodge of bits and pieces from here and there. It fails to provide the kind of overview of progress on the implementation of the Secretary-General's reform package that Member States require. As an energetic supporter of the Secretary-General's efforts — and I would like to underline that — we speak with a good deal of disappointment.

We were pleased earlier in this session to compliment the Secretary-General on his excellent report contained in document A/53/1. We applauded his success in bringing about a "quiet revolution" to revitalize the machinery of the Organization.

Some of those achievements are indeed referred to in the report before us. But there is virtually nothing in this report that gives Member States a guide to the qualitative impact of the implementation of the Secretary-General's programme for reform or an indication of planning for the coming year.

There are also some notable omissions, possibly for technical reasons. Results-based budgeting is not discussed, but we note that it was considered by the Fifth Committee under item 112 on 20 November. Overall, however, one wonders about the utility of this item in its present format if the Secretary-General's programme is not addressed in a comprehensive manner, as was surely the intention of the General Assembly when it adopted resolution 52/12 A.

As I have said, I raise these questions with a sense of disappointment, because my delegation has counted itself as being among the Secretary-General's strongest supporters in seeking to reform and modernize this Organization.

I would also like to address the General Assembly on the subject of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. My delegation believes there is an immediate need to revitalize the work of the United Nations in environment and human settlements and welcomes the Task Force's efforts in this regard. We think the report presents us with some thoughtful recommendations to enhance the role of both the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

New Zealand sees a major problem with the architecture of international environment and sustainable development agencies. There seems to be a serious disjunction between the policy directions agreed at the highest international level and the subsequent implementation of activities important for sustainable development. Part of the problem is due to insufficient

communication and cooperation among the governing bodies of different agencies and organizations. That is why New Zealand is so pleased to see the Task Force report under discussion today, as a number of its recommendations address these key questions.

New Zealand thinks the Task Force recommendations will help to refocus the activities of UNEP and Habitat to allow greater coherence in establishing policy settings and implementing them. Many of the recommendations in the report are ones which must be discussed and decided in the Governing Councils of UNEP and Habitat or are the direct responsibility of the Secretary-General or of the Executive Director of UNEP. Several, however, require direction from the General Assembly, and my delegation would like to offer our view on those.

New Zealand strongly supports the recommendations on inter-agency linkages, as we think these will assist us towards the goal of stopping duplication of work between the United Nations and other agencies and making more effective use of resources. We particularly support the recommendations regarding UNEP's support to global and regional conventions, on request, on the basis of its information, monitoring and assessment role. We think this is a core task for UNEP to perform and very much consistent with the Nairobi mandate and subsequent discussions at last year's special session. There is an important coordinating role that an efficient, responsive and fully functioning UNEP can play in this regard.

New Zealand also believes it is important to avoid further dispersal of convention secretariats and the resulting inefficiencies and costs which that imposes on Member States. We support efforts to achieve co-location of new secretariats and believe that cooperation among conventions would be assisted by such an arrangement.

My delegation can see the value in trying to increase the involvement of Governments in global environment issues and the United Nations Environment Programme processes. Hosting of annual ministerial meetings, provided these are useful to ministers, may achieve this. The timing of such meetings to precede the annual Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) meeting would allow for greater complementarity with and input into the work of CSD.

My delegation would also like to make particular mention of the recommendation in the report that Governments make additional efforts to achieve consistency in national positions across the various intergovernmental forums. We believe this lack of consistency contributes to the disjunction mentioned earlier between policy directions agreed to at the highest level and the way these are eventually implemented by the relevant agencies under direction from their governing bodies. My delegation considers that there is a need for greater environmental and economic policy integration in particular and would support all efforts in this regard.

Finally, I would just like to express my appreciation for the preparation of this constructive report and look forward to further discussions in appropriate forums and its subsequent implementation.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation is very pleased by the opportunity offered to us today, one year after the adoption by this Assembly of a new batch of reforms, to evaluate how far we have come since then and to exchange, with clarity and tranquillity, our opinions, analyses and — why not — our proposals regarding what might be done to allow the process of reform to continue, deepen and strengthen.

The United Nations Organization that we want to have in place in order to confront successfully present and future challenges still needs to be created. Yet bolder reforms must be introduced to ensure that the United Nations can play its role as an intergovernmental organization and yet be open to the world; to re-establish balance in the relationships among the Organization's principal organs, in particular between the Security Council and the General Assembly; to modernize and further democratize its working methods; and, finally, to restore the Organization's original dual calling to preserve international peace and security and to promote international cooperation for development.

Thus our responsibility as Member States to promote the reform process remains, and this debate is an opportunity for us to ensure that this process continues in the direction that we have set out and to provide the Secretary-General, who has committed himself with courage and determination to this long-term undertaking, the support that he has the right to expect from us.

This being the case, this debate, to be useful and fruitful, must have a sufficiently healthy foundation and must be focused around two complementary axes. The first is the evaluation of the implementation of measures already decided upon, taking into account their impact on the role of the Organization and on States. Specifically, I would like to emphasize that the absence of preliminary

general reaction to the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/53/676 is explained by the fact that it was issued late. At the appropriate moment my delegation will offer its opinions in this regard; however — and although later we will make more substantial comments about this item — I would still like now to draw attention to the information given under Action 15 of this document, in particular that relating to the memorandum of understanding signed between the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I stress that it is the High Commissioner for Human Rights, instead of what is written under Action 15, which speaks of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Sometimes there are strange happenings in this house, but a change in the name of such an important body should not pass unnoticed. We believe this is a dangerous practice that flouts the will of States and which is part of an approach geared towards surreptitiously revising and infringing upon the mandates of funds and programmes.

Secondly, there is the thorough study of the recommendations that have already or have just been submitted for approval by States. As was clearly emphasized by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, the statement of which my delegation endorses, it is essential that the continuation of the reform of the Organization, as well as the follow-up and evaluation of this reform, be part of a transparent intergovernmental process and be open to the participation of all the Member States.

The easiest solution would simply be to continue the mechanism of open-ended informal consultations of the plenary, an approach adopted during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. However — as any honest and objective evaluation would show — this mechanism fell far short of encouraging an adequate examination of the reforms and did not make it possible to get all the States to make an effective and real commitment, *inter alia*, because of the absence of verbatim records reflecting countries' positions and the absence of a report that would have facilitated the follow-up. Thus this time my delegation would favour the establishment of an ad hoc plenary working group chaired by the General Assembly President.

Such a working group — in whose meetings the Secretary-General or his representative could be invited to participate — should provide a formal framework sufficient to ensure the continuity and coherence that are necessary for any intergovernmental debate on reform. In a first stage this working group could decide on its work programme, taking account of the great variety of issues covered under agenda item 30. It would be possible, with this framework, to decide to examine certain questions directly and to refer others to the competent intergovernmental bodies for study and consideration. Thus, for example, the question of the environment and human settlements could be studied in the Second Committee. In a second stage the actual examination could be undertaken, making sure that no time limit was imposed on the exercise. However, of course this could not be used as a pretext for uselessly prolonging the reflections and considerations. Finally, we should avoid any overlapping of meetings for discussing the reforms and meetings of the main Assembly Committees.

The Secretary-General's report on the work of Organization in the area of the environment and human settlements, in document A/53/463, and the measures and recommendations therein, fill out and enrich his reform programme by trying to take charge of areas of such importance as the environment and human settlements. Under the dynamic leadership of Mr. Klaus Toepfer, the concerned Task Force has been able in a relatively short time to submit recommendations of substance and great scope. I would like to express our appreciation and thanks for this.

My delegation certainly appreciates the Secretary-General's classification of 24 recommendations in a first category that comprises the measures within the purview of the Secretariat, and a second category for recommendations to be submitted for consideration and approval at the intergovernmental level.

It is clear that, beyond the great importance of these recommendations, some aspects of them will require further clarification and information. At the same time, sometimes these recommendations have implications that the intergovernmental apparatus will have to do its best to identify in order to be able to take the decisions thus required. Further, it would behoove us to keep in mind that, on account of their implications, some of the measures proposed as being within the purview of the Secretariat should also be studied at the intergovernmental level. Moreover, in considering the recommendations we cannot avoid taking up another aspect of the reform — the new concept of trusteeship noted in A/52/849. As regards the time limits of new initiatives, discussed in document A/52/851 and its corrigendum and addendum, my delegation would like to reiterate that it is worth continuing to involve the

competent intergovernmental bodies — I refer to Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee.

The issue of a Millennium Assembly, cited in document A/52/850, is of great importance insofar as it should crystallize the aspirations of the entire membership and give form to their joint resolve to approach the new millennium with an Organization equal to their expectations.

The Secretary-General has made known some of his ideas and proposals on this subject. It would be most desirable to hear the views of Member States on this matter and, we feel, the sooner the better.

It is our view that preparation for this event should also be dealt with appropriately at the inter-Governmental level. The matter involves all delegations and cannot be the monopoly of any group of self-proclaimed or self-appointed States, however well-intentioned they may be.

For this reason, my delegation strongly favours establishing a separate working group, under the authority of the President of the General Assembly, which would, in transparency and with the participation of all Member States, consider the modalities for organizing the Millennium Assembly and the issues which will be discussed there. This working group would have a precise schedule and would be time-limited and could later become a preparatory committee per se.

To sum up, my delegation would be in favour of establishing a plenary ad hoc working group to consider elements of reform under agenda item 30, with the possibility of referring certain issues to the competent inter-Governmental organs. We favour a second plenary ad hoc working group dealing exclusively with the Millennium Assembly.

In conclusion, I assure you, Mr. President, that the Algerian delegation is prepared to make an open and constructive contribution to our work on these various issues.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.